

# TBI Scripted

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The magazine celebrating television's golden era of scripted programming

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## Editor's Note



Speak to those running TV companies and you'll hear the same thing time and time again. Television as a means to an end is no longer enough – it's all about owning brands and developing money-spinning franchises.

For scripted television that's dangerous. It means the cost of rights going up. It means Amazon paying US\$250 million simply to have the right to produce a *Lord of the Rings* series, with each season costing up to US\$150 million, according to some estimates.

Amazon's rationale is actually tied up in the existing relationship customers have with the Amazon Prime subscription product, which offers next-day deliveries (wonder if that promise was kept over Christmas?) and other services the likes of Netflix and Hulu can't offer. There will be a big uptick in *Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit* book sales when the series launches, so in theory the deal expands the mythology and adds to the bottom line. It's still a big gamble.

Rival Netflix is also getting to the brand building game through its acquisition of comic book publisher Millarworld, which is behind the *Kingsman* and *Kick-Ass* movies. There hasn't been a number put on the deal, though it's unlikely be a small sum.

That's still a gamble, too. Millarworld has never had one of its properties successfully turned into a TV series, and while it has form in movies, there's plenty of work to be done. It will cost plenty of cash to make it work.

With the economics of TV becoming increasingly confused – the inclination to go for brand-defining, recognisable IP is only going to get stronger. Just look at the dramas that were rebooted in 2017 and those coming this year and next – *Star Trek*, *The Twilight Zone* and *Amazing Stories* just to name a few.

There's no doubt drama television is getting better, but for that continue new ideas need to be allowed to flourish and get the financial support needed to do that. Hopefully, those holding the purse strings believe the same thing.

Jesse Whittock

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# The battle for demand

Game of Thrones

HBO's *Game of Thrones* reigned supreme as the most in-demand show across 2017, our exclusive data shows

*Game of Thrones* (GOT) is measurably the biggest scripted show in the world right now. Our data from Parrot Analytics looks at the top ten 'overall' and 'digital' in-demand shows across the UK, Germany, France, Italy and the US across 2017, reveals that GOT was the most in-demand overall show in all the territories bar the US.

The drama's seventh season produced nearly eleven million average demand expressions in the UK, 13.7 million in Germany, 12.6 million France and 11.4 million in Italy. In the US the show came in as a close second to *The Walking Dead* (TWD), which received 53.3 million demand expressions, whereas GOT received nearly 50 million.

For SVOD originals the most popular shows are more varied. *The Grand Tour* came up top in the UK, *Star Trek: Discovery* in Germany, *Orange is the New Black* in France, *Narcos* in Italy and *Stranger Things* in the US.

In the UK, GOT and *The Walking Dead* produced markedly more demand expressions than other titles. TWD came in a close second having achieved 9.9 million demand expressions at press time.

Other shows in the UK achieved results around the three million mark, with *The Big Bang Theory* drawing 3.9 million expressions, *Westworld* taking in 3.8 million and *The Flash* generating 3.7 million.

*The Grand Tour*, which took the top digital originals spot, also was among the overall most popular along with Netflix's *Stranger Things*, producing 3.6 million and 3.3 million demand expressions, respectively.

Amazon's Jeremy Clarkson-led *Grand Tour* topped European charts repeatedly in 2017. Data from Parrot highlighted popularity in the UK and Germany in February and wider European success mid-year.

Non-Netflix digital originals did well in the UK in general, with Hulu's *The Handmaid's Tale*, CBS's *Star Trek: Discovery*, and *The Man in the High Castle* from Amazon all gaining demand.

Like the UK, Germany's top demand trends were for GOT and *The Walking Dead*. However, Germany has more of an affinity for local originals, and our data features *The Voice of Germany* and *Köln 50667*.

*Pretty Little Liars* also performed particularly well, drawing 8.1 million demand expressions in our latest top ten list.



For Germany, *Star Trek* was 2017's most popular digital production, drawing in an average of five million demand expressions. The show is followed by Netflix originals *Stranger Things*, *13 Reasons Why*, *Narcos* and *House of Cards*, while German audiences were also big fans of *Gilmore Girls: A Year in the Life* and *Black Mirror*.

*The Walking Dead* and its follow-up series *Fear The Walking Dead* performed well in France. The shows produced 11.7 million and 3.7 million expressions on average respectively. French original *Koh-lanta* also appeared on the list with 3.6 million demand expressions.

French digital originals were led by *Orange is the New Black*, which took an average of 5.1 million expressions across the year. *OITNB* started its fifth season this year.

*Stranger Things* followed the show in second place with 4.8 million expressions, and was trailed by *Narcos*, *13 Reasons Why* and *Black Mirror*. *Sense8* also made an impression on local audiences despite its cancellation earlier this year.

Italian tastes showed by far the most differentiation last year. While *GOT* was overall the most in-demand series in the territory, it was followed by Italian drama *Gomorrah*, which gained 7.5 million expressions on average, and *Grey's Anatomy*, which took seven million on average, and then a host of Italian originals.

*Grande Fratello*, *X Factor: Italia*, *Le Tre Rose Di Eva* and *Il Paradiso Delle Signore* all appeared in our overall demand charts for Italy in 2017.

*Gomorrah*, meanwhile, has achieved international success through coproducer and distributor Beta Film, while its lead producer, Cattleya, sold a majority share to ITV Studios earlier in the year.

The nation's taste for digital content includes Netflix original shows *Castlevania* and *GLOW*. Leading the field is *Narcos*, which generated 3.9 demand expressions on average. The show generated over a million more expressions than *Stranger Things*, which was the second most popular locally.

The US broke *Game of Thrones*' stranglehold on demand globally. *The Walking Dead*, which has seen its ratings fall off a cliff on AMC in the US last year, led the way in terms of demand, with Adult Swim's toon *Rick and Morty* appearing in third overall, having generated 21 million demand expressions on average throughout for the year. *The Flash* from The CW and *Shameless* from Showtime were also popular.

*Stranger Things* was the nation's top digital series, with an average of 16 million demand expressions. It was followed closely by *Star Trek*, which drew in 15.7 million, while *Ozark*, *13 Reasons Why*, *Castlevania* and *Narcos* were all among the most in-demand shows.

Will *Game of Thrones* rule again in 2018? **S**



# The Wright time to revisit history

Geoffrey Wright's earth-shaking 1992 movie *Romper Stomper* redefined representations of violence on the big screen, and now the Australian director is bringing the title to TV sets as a drama series for SVOD service Stan. Jesse Whittock meets him to find out why



**T**here's so much crazy shit going on these days you really can't go wrong."

Geoffrey Wright, sat in the lobby of the Pullman hotel near King's Cross in London, is telling TBI how the current political climate means it is the perfect time to revisit his seminal, violence-fuelled movie *Romper Stomper*.

"At no time since the old movie have the circumstances been as conducive to material as now – the advent of Donald Trump and Brexit," continues the Australian film director. "This means there's been a shift in sentiment over dissatisfaction about the mainstream parties, and the things that had lingered began to become more visible at the edges of the mainstream."

"All sorts of animals from the forest that we hadn't seen for some time – in some cases, ever – began popping their heads up. It occurred

to me that Hando [the main character in the movie] would find the situation more than interesting. He would not be displeased with the turning of events – there are extremists everywhere."

The original *Romper Stomper* followed a group of Australian skinhead neo-Nazis intent on terrorising the immigrant Vietnamese population of early 1990s suburban Melbourne. Ranked up there with *Clockwork Orange* in terms of shock-factor, the film also acted as breakout role for Russell Crowe, who played Hando.

A number of the original actors reprise their roles in the reboot, which launched on Australian SVOD service Stan on January 1 and has DCD Rights attached to distribute internationally, with Sundance Channel Global already a buyer for various territories.

Spoiler for those who haven't seen the film – Crowe is not among those returning – but the show will revisit similar themes of mindless aggression, anarchy, alienation and racism.

Instead of the Vietnamese, a new batch of far-right thugs led by Lachy Hulme (*Gallipoli*) target Muslim Australians and anti-fascism groups in modern day Melbourne.

### The TV switch

Wright had rarely considered a sequel or TV format of the film that launched his career, but recent events changed his mind. "It became obvious to almost everyone that it was time to look at this material again," he says.

The series came about when Dan Edwards, son and producing partner of prolific Australian television drama producer John Edwards – known for shows such as *Gallipoli* and *Puberty Blues* – contacted Wright's creative partner, Dan Scharf.

The Edwards' Roadshow Rough Diamond, which is a joint venture with Roadshow Films, became the producer and sold the idea to Nine Network- and Fairfax Media-backed Stan, which had form in rebooting cult movies with its version of horror *Wolf Creek*.

"A lot of memories of the old film came flooding back, not so much from a story, but a stylistic point of view," says Wright of the production process. He adds that due to numerous action scenes, some involving people on fire and graphic fighting, meant the rough 'n' ready principles of the original movie were revisited: "I didn't sit there and think we would go hand-held and dirty, but the subject matter and constraints of TV made that approach not only satisfying, but also essential."

Shooting was completed very quickly, which Wright found an unusual experience; different from the slow, methodical approach to feature film production. He quips that the energy he had as a 33-year-old in 1992 was leveled off by a breadth of knowledge and experience acquired since then, meaning, "You can offset the slight paunch and moving slower with that".

However, the biggest shock was in pre-production. "I barely had time to meet the cast, and in some cases I met them for the first time on set," he says. "I'd seen them in the testing process, but not in person."

Meanwhile, the philosophy of television production required new approaches. "Being in a situation where producers are more powerful means there is a different culture in TV, and that is something entirely new to think about," says Wright. "Once we were on set rocking and rolling I felt we managed it fine, and I really enjoyed the process."



The director is 58 and appears calmer in person than you might expect given the subject matter of *Romper Stomper* and the subsequent controversy it caused (Wright received death threats and was dubbed an enfant terrible of Australian cinema by some after its release). However, a trace of the old fire appears when talking about “frustrating” production processes.

“Aesthetically, people can play faster and looser games than they do,” he says. “Sometimes some people are thinking about TV the way it was 20 years ago, and it is hard to get out of that mentality. Some people need to make an effort because it is different and it is not being fully exploited.”

Wright believes effort to change can and should be made. “I’m seeing a different way of producing,” he says. “I would like to bring department heads in much sooner than they come in, but the way we go about production hasn’t changed much in 70 or 80 years.”

He believes “shrinking shooting times are offsetting the advantages of the current technology”, but that pre-production, in particular, can be much more efficient with a few simple changes.

“I wrote episode six of the series, which was ambitious from a logistical point of view, and I just wish the first AD [assistant director] was at my elbow as I was writing,” he adds. “It would have solved a lot of problems and we could have spent more times on other things.”

“The technology we use has changed enormously, but the way we prepare ourselves should be looked at. To me, people are stuck in a rut and there are more creative and interesting ways you can go about it that will save time and money.”

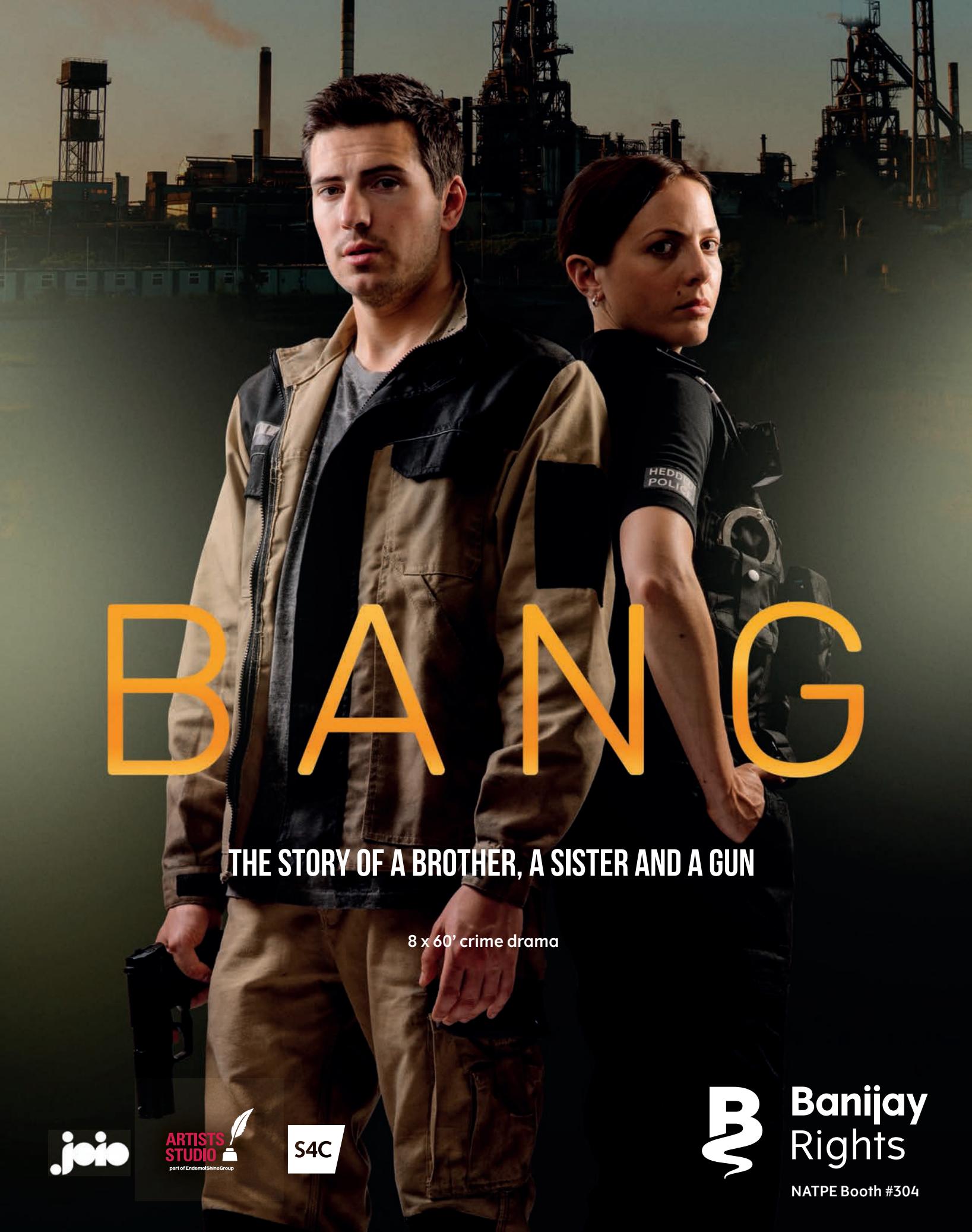
He is also critical of that many Australian creatives are not getting work in cinema “so they are migrating to TV”, adding the latter medium is “a good way to get them started” and that “long-form has enormous potential, and it is exciting”.

However, Wright has no time for series that pad in order to make up the scheduled minutes at the expense of proper plotting. “Momentum is important to me, and it’s about not shirking the stakes: I hate anti-climaxes,” he says.

“That is one problem I have with long-form as a consumer. Come on, man, gimme a break – I know you’re stringing this out. You can feel the filler being pushed from a tube.”

For Wright, today’s climate means there’s no excuse for such dodges when it comes to drama television – the election Donald Trump, Vladimir Putin, terror cells and Brexit are providing daily plot lines.

“You’ve only got to digest what you see in the news for this type of story,” he says. Sounds like you really can’t go wrong. **S**



# BANG

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# In the spotlight: Mitchell, Webb and Blackwell

British comedy trio David Mitchell, Robert Webb and Simon Blackwell reveal how they approach sitcom writing and performing

**D**avid Mitchell and Robert Webb are one of Britain's most popular comic duos and the stars of the cult classic sitcom *Peep Show*, while Simon Blackwell is among the UK's best funnymen scribes, having written for Armando Iannucci's HBO series *Veep*, BBC comedy *The Thick of It* and spin-off movie *In the Loop* and Chris Morris feature *Four Lions*.

Last year, the trio debuted *Back*, a British sitcom that reunited Mitchell and Webb in front of the camera. Blackwell created and wrote the series.

Unlike *Peep Show*, which starred Mitchell and Webb as loser flat mates Mark and Jez, *Back* reimagines the pair. Mitchell plays Stephen, a man taking over a rural pub from his recently deceased father, with Webb taking on the role of Andrew, who was briefly fostered by Stephen's parents and returns for unknown reasons.

Here, in a break from the usual In the Spotlight format, they talk about the process of creating the show, which launched on Channel 4 at the back end of last year to strong ratings. A second season has been commissioned to continue the story.





### How we ensured *Back* was different to *Peep Show*

**Simon Blackwell:** There was always going to be a shadow of *Peep Show* because it ran for twelve years. It was a cultural touchstone and one of the best sitcoms ever made, and when you're launching something else starring the same two leads you don't do it lightly. We decided to let that shadow be whatever it needed to be and make the show we wanted to make, which is a very different beast. But we were always aware of it.

**Robert Webb:** It was a process that when Simon had the idea of the pub and foster child, we saw the scripts and began to think, 'okay, this is very different'.

**SB:** I noticed that week by week, as the show went out, that the reaction of critics in print and online referenced *Peep Show* less and less. People were aware that while it has David and Robert in it, *Back* is a different beast.

**David Mitchell:** We wanted it to be different and to be its own thing, but we didn't want that to happen bloody-mindedly.

### How *Back* exploits the existing dynamics of Mitchell and Webb's relationship

**SB:** My first thought was, 'Let's cast absolutely against type', but that was a rubbish thought: you're throwing away 20 years of this dynamic that Robert and David have developed as performers, not just in *Peep Show*, but also in [sketch series] *That Mitchell & Webb Show*.

You throw away those 20 years at your peril, really. What you do is use it in a new situation with a new vibe to create a new show with two performers who work with each other incredibly well.

**DM:** The characters are older. Jez and Mark are post-university, but this is a show about middle age. It also deals with death, and those things aren't really themes in *Peep Show*. Plus, Andrew [Webb's character] is infinitely more capable than Jeremy. Stephen is more of a victim than Mark, who is nastier.

**SB:** There is a core of steel to Mark, which lets you know he will survive, but with Stephen, you're not sure if he has that in him.

**DM:** Yes, as he says at one point in the show, 'I'm exactly the sort of man who would kill himself'.





### How to identify a badly scripted television joke

**SB:** I never laugh at anything I've written if I like it, and if I do it's a very bad sign. It goes straight in the bin.

**RW:** I do. I laugh at loads of my own jokes – I run around the room and do a dance.

**SB:** I talk a lot when I write. I have to say it out loud and do the voices so I can get the rhythms right, but I rarely make myself laugh, and when I do it tends to go. A laugh means it's too obvious or too out of character – I've surprised myself, so it's thereby out of my writing style and doesn't fit with the vibe of the show. It is an outlier, and therefore, has to be murdered.

### How the writing process of *Back* evolved

**RW:** The writing was almost entirely done by Simon, although there were a couple of days where we got together to work on storylines.

**SB:** Jesse Armstrong and Tony Roche helped, and there was additional material from Ian Martin and Will Smith, whom I had worked with on *Veep* and *The Thick of It*. It's nice to have those guys there as they act as safety net when reading jokes from the script. When you've written in a team, you have that security of people who pick up on those things that aren't quite working. Also, there wasn't as much improvisation in *Back* as some of the other things I've written on.

### Why US development execs fail to remake UK sitcoms

**RW:** The first *Peep Show* remake was just like the original, except there was no POV and no internal monologues – it was basically two blokes in a flat. They will isolate the thing they paid for and then get rid of it.

**SB:** It's the same as when they first remade *The Thick of It*: they shot it on sticks and took away the swearing.

**DM:** That's about the politics of television. At the point when *Peep Show* was first remade, it had done two runs in the UK to nice reviews, but *The Office* had just taken off in Britain and America. The thing to be saying you were doing was that you'd optioned some hip, new, edgy British sitcom and were making an American version. That is the wrong reason to option an idea.

You should option an idea because you like it and can visualise it in an American context, but they would say, 'You can't say this idea is shit, because it's already proven'. Then they decide they don't want any of things they've actually bought, but want to be able to say, 'Don't get cross with us that it didn't work; it is a perfectly plausible notion to remake a successful British show'.

The fact that's how money is often spent in television is one of the big problems – people aren't really thinking about making the best show, they're thinking about the next stage up and getting something on the development slate – what won't be shouted down? Well, this can't be, because it's worked somewhere else.

Then they don't really believe in the idea and they fuck it up. That's what happened the first time around. I don't know what happened subsequently and I haven't seen the others.

I'm conflicted about it because I like the fact we're in the only one. I don't want a huge, 700-episode American version that eclipses our pathetic twelve years of making *54*; so slow like it's claymation. At the same time, it would be great news for Sam [Bain] and Jesse [Armstrong], who are great writers and great friends of ours. It would be great for them, and sad for me.

The last time I heard the US was having another go, but it appears we're actually in one of the 'off years'. **S**

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# Spotlight on a post-noir world



Scandinavia's most influential writers and producers, best known for dark detective noirs, are branching out and SVOD players want their new ideas. Jesse Whittock reports

**I**t is more than a decade since *The Killing* first aired on Danish pubcaster DR and changed the reputation of Scandinavian drama in the eyes of the international industry.

The show, a multi-faceted police drama with seriously dark undertones, was later

followed by Hans Rosenfeldt's Danish-Swedish coproduction *The Bridge*, which debuted on DR and SVT in 2011, the same year AMC first remade *The Killing* in the US.

"No show from Scandinavia had really got international interest before apart from *The Killing*," says Rosenfeldt, who has seen his

show remade in the UK and France, the US, and Russia, and inspired an upcoming Sky drama for Germany and Austria.

Both *The Killing* and *The Bridge* are now considered seminal 'Nordic noirs', and continue to impact global drama making, but with times changing and the world a very



different place to when those shows debuted, what's next for Scandinavia's drama scene?

For starters, the pool of buyers has grown. Subscription VOD services such as Viaplay, Netflix and HBO Nordic can all claim sizeable local customer bases, and have become commissioners in their own right,

vying for projects with incumbents like DR, NRK, SVT, YLE, TV3 and TV4.

Indeed, Netflix's first global coproduction deal was for NRK drama *Lilyhammer*, and this year commissioned its first local original, Miso Film's dystopian drama *Rain*. A second, *Störst av Allt* (*Quicksand*), which

is from *The Bridge* writer Camilla Ahlgren and based on Malin Persson Giolito's novel set around a trial after as mass shooting at a prep school, soon followed.

"SVT and TV4 are still the biggest commissioners, but TV has a tight range," says Rosenfeldt. "STV can take some risks, but now Netflix can pretty much produce anything it wants."

In September, the same month Netflix unveiled *Quicksand*, HBO Nordic revealed news of its first original from the region, a "mix of comedy and Dostoevsky" from Swedish filmmaker Lukas Moodysson (*Show Me Love*) called *Gosta*.

Over a year prior, HBO Europe's programming and production chief, Anthony Root described Scandinavia to TBI as a "very sophisticated and mature TV market".

"Scandinavia has always been good at character-driven stories," says Daniel Lägersten, executive producer at Swedish indie Brain Academy. "We haven't always had the budgets for explosions and action, so we have had to stick to characters."

Not so for his next show, however. Along with the UK-based Twelve Town (fka Pinewood Television), Brain Academy is coproducing an eight-part, revenge thriller meets psychological drama called *Conspiracy of Silence* for the most active of region's SVOD services, the MTG-owned Viaplay.

"They're investing because they want originals to take off," says Lägersten, whose company was part of the team that produced Viaplay's first original, the Keanu Reeves-starring *Swedish Dicks*. "They have jumped in to the market, and want to add the *Conspiracy of Silence* because it's thematic, suspenseful and controversial," he adds.

The series, which Eccho Rights is selling internationally, follows a repentant former arms dealer, played by Jens Hulten, who returns to Sweden to get revenge on a former colleague, only to find that his target has been raising the daughter he never knew he had.

Hulten, known for roles in *Mission Impossible – Rogue Nation* and *Skyfall*, says the subject matter is what makes it an intriguing proposition for the international market: "We've been doing all these police shows for so long now, and I don't think that's very interesting for the international market any more – they have their own cops and it is cliché. This is a problem that



The Killing



The Bridge

concerns everyone – we are feeding the world these killing machines.”

Rosenfeldt is also producing a new type of drama for Viaplay, which currently has around 50 series in development. The scribe is penning *The Lawyer*, a ten-part drama also going out on MTG linear channel TV3. The show is another revenge story, following a successful lawyer seeking revenge for the murder of his parents when he was a child.

“We’re probably moving away from the straight police procedurals, especially with another female lead with some kind of diagnosis,” Rosenfeldt says referring to Sofia Hélin’s lead character in *The Bridge*. “That ship has sailed, and we’re moving into other areas. That’s why *The Lawyer* has a new focus. Most of us are looking in other directions.”

Nicklas Wikström Nicastro, series producer at *The Lawyer*’s producer, SF Studios (fka Svensk Filmindustri), says: “*Wallander* and other classic Scandinavian crime stories have been done well for a long time. It would be simple just to do the same thing and make a profit each time, but you can’t take that approach.”

France’s Studiocanal is selling the series, having previously found many keen on its previous Scandi offer, *Midnight Sun*, which was a coproduction between SVT and Canal+ about a battle for the future in a dystopian European super-state.

Indeed, European territories are increasingly looking to Nordic producers and writers for inspiration. Another Viaplay original with SF Studios attached, *Alex*, is being coproduced by UK-based Nevision,

whose distribution subsidiary, About Premium Content, has distribution rights.

Elsewhere, *Conspiracy of Silence* coproducer Twelve Town hired former SVT drama chief Christian Wikander to aid its international coproduction business, while Rosenfeldt wrote the Red Productions-produced ITV and Netflix drama *Marcella*, which Cineflix Rights has shopped around the world. ITV Studios has also just bought into Apple Tree Productions, the new indie producer former DR drama chief Piv Bernth has launched her ex-chief lieutenant at the pubcaster, Lars Hermann.

However, ITV isn’t the only British buyer with growing taste for content from Northern Europe. Channel 4-backed foreign-language drama service Walter Presents recently acquired Icelandic drama *Case*, which was originally commissioned by Channel 2 as a spin-off of *Réttur* (*The Court*) and goes out internationally through Red Arrow International.

The show, which has also sold to HBO Europe in Central and Eastern Europe and which is described by Walter Iuzzolino as “challenging drama”, follows a lawyer and a pair of detectives investigating the apparent suicide of a ballerina, whose adopted parents believe there is more to the story.

While the series fits the crime profile of many shows from the region, Kjartan Thor Thordarson, CEO of Case producer Sagafilm, says that audiences are changing. “Medical dramas and simple family dramas are performing well,” he says, pointing to the likes of YLE’s *Nurses*. “We’re bringing out one called *The Minister*, which goes into

production next year. We feel there is an appetite for something other than murder.”

Thordarson describes another noise-making Sagafilm series, *Stella Blomkvist*, as “more like LA noir” than traditional Nordic noir. “It’s more colourful than the gritty palate of Scandinavia,” he adds, noting that the style attracted a new buyer, private free-to-air network Sjónvarp Símans.

Ratings have been remarkable, with the numbers equating to almost half of Iceland’s population (150,000 out of 330,000) checking out the 6x45mins drama in the week after its premiere on Sjónvarp Símans’ premium SVOD service.

*Stella Blomkvist* is based on first-person murder mystery books written by an author who writes under the pseudonym used for the series’ title, and Red Arrow is again involved as distributor.

Thordarson believes that the traditional broadcasters are also being forced to think outside the box. “They are a little more open to making this type of drama,” he says.

One of those traditional broadcast groups, Discovery Networks Sweden, has commissioned *Heder (Honour)*, which comes from Bigster, the new indie of *Gåsmannen* star Alexandra Rapaport, producer Birgitta Wännström and former Discovery Networks exec Calle Jansson.

“The networks have grown up a lot,” says Wännström. “They are braver and have more self esteem as channels. They know they have to really have the sense of a project – if it’s not good enough you go to another show, so more and more they want to work with people who are devoted.”



INTERNATIONAL FESTIVAL

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**Deadline: February 23, 2018**

*Heder* is being produced with what Rapaport describes as a “flat production organisation” – with producers, writers, actors and directors teaming to make collaborative decisions about the series. “When you’re an actor you come into the work very late, and we wanted to be involved in moulding the dough together,” she adds. “It’s a flat hierarchy – the best suggestion wins, and everyone is a coproducer.”

The show, which has been billed as ‘the *Millennium* trilogy meets *Sex and the City*’, is a thriller about four female lawyers and long time friends working to help abused women who are individually targeted by an unknown threat.

Rapaport co-created the series with the stars of two other Swedish scripted series – Sofia Hélin, who was the female lead in *The Tunnel*, and Julia Dufvenius and Anja Lundqvist from TV3 comedy *Mammor*.

“Often we come into a show, we have a part and if there is a problem with the script we try to fix it,” says Hélin. “Quite often it’s a bit too late, and it would be such a shame to continue working that way. Since we have been working on several shows for many seasons, we have a working knowledge. I learned so much from every season of *The Bridge*, so it is a waste not to use that knowledge.”

SVT and Viaplay have also pooled resources to launch one of the biggest recent hits in Swedish TV history, *Vår Tid är Nu* (*The Restaurant*), a period drama from Banijay Group’s Jarowskij and Film i Väst.

The series begins on May 7, 1945, at the end of World War II in Europe and follows a Stockholm family who struggle to keep their restaurant alive amid financial troubles and personal strife. It has been drawing more than 1.5 million viewers per week for pubcaster SVT, making it the network’s most successful drama ever.

Banijay Rights has been pushing it heavily since MIPCOM, with two seasons already in the bag and another coming. YLE has the rights in Finland and debuted it in October last year.

While the Nordic noir that *The Killing* and *The Bridge* brought to global attention remains a core local product for Scandinavian television, could it be that a family period drama will be the next international hit from the region? **S**



Stella Blomqvist



*The Restaurant*



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# Doctor on call

**ABC's autism-themed medical drama is the biggest new show on US primetime**

**E**very year, TBI travels to the LA Screenings in May to view the latest pilots from the US broadcasters. Picking which will become new season hits is rarely easy, and although *The Good Doctor* was clearly a strong contender last year, nobody was predicting the success it has achieved since launch on ABC on September 25.

With Freddie Highmore (*Bates Motel*) and Richard Schiff (*The West Wing*) on its bill, *The Good Doctor* isn't lacking for star power, and they have helped propel the show to the top of the broadcast ratings charts.

Nielsen data shows it is outperforming the evergreen CBS military police procedural *NCIS* and NBC critical darling *This is Us* to become the number one drama of the fall season with an average of 17.2 million in total viewers and a 3.8 rating in 18-49s.

Further afield, ratings have been good in the Australia, Canada, the UK, South Korea and Spain, and distributor Sony Pictures Television (SPT) has sold it to nearly 200 territories overall.

SPT president of international distribution Keith Le Goy says it has become "the number one drama in the world", adding: "It's the must-watch, must-have drama that our partners in the US and around the world have been clamouring for."

The new ABC drama is also one of the highest profile series, along

with BBC show *The A Word*, to shine a light on autism – a condition that makes communication difficult for an affected person, though can gift them with incredible powers of reasoning and intellect.

"It's broadcast TV, but it's also one of those rare occasions where you actually have the opportunity to get to do some good with a series," says David Shore, who helms the series through his Shore Z prodco.

Shore – known for leading another huge medical procedural, *House* – developed the series with actor and producer Daniel Dae Kim (*Lost*, *Hawaii 5-0*) after the scripts were brought into the US from Asia.

The original series debuted on KBS2 in South Korea in 2013, before the concept was packaged for the US and pitched around before Shore took over. Sony is producing through its deal with the showrunner.

Both Shore and Le Goy point to Highmore's central performance as Dr Shaun Murphy, a Boston surgeon and savant with Asperger's Syndrome, with the former saying: "It will raise questions about how the public understands the condition".

Murphy is able to recognise problems and diagnose illness on a level far beyond most regular doctors, but struggles with human interaction, and his superiors clash over his employment.

Over the course of the first season, which is shot in Canada and runs to 18 episodes, viewers learn if he can live up to the show's title. **S**



David Shore and Freddie Highmore

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# Writer's Room

## How to design a *Black Mirror*

Charlie Brooker can lay claim to creating an entirely new TV genre when he launched *Black Mirror* on Channel 4 in the UK six years ago, terrifying audiences with scripted tales of technological nightmares. The show is now produced for Netflix, and here Brooker reveals what goes into each programme, which he creates with producer Annabel Jones

There are many films and TV shows that influence *Black Mirror*. *The Twilight Zone* is an obvious one. *The Truman Show* is another – it touches on all sorts of topics, but it in a fun, enjoyable way. *The Wicker Man* pops up in our shows, as do lots of weird and wonderful TV shows.

What happens generally is an episode will start with Annabel and I discussing an idea. It could be an issue like parenting or an observation on life, and at some point there will be a ‘what if’ idea. It will ping-pong back and forwards, as I try to think of the worst possible outcome.

At the point when I realised I can't shut up, that's when we think we've got something. I then write up a brief treatment of a couple of pages and send that off to Netflix. They come back with feedback and I go off and write the first draft. Sometimes it takes two or three days, sometimes two or three weeks or sometimes it's months. It's random.

Then I email the script to Annabel and she pulls it apart, in a good way. That's a process any writer has to go through – you hand it over, the notes come back and you get really defensive. Sometimes you rip it up at that point. You think, ‘fuck it, it's not working’, and you start again, or you park it and go on to another one.

When the director and cast come on board, it all changes again. Jodie Foster had lots of thoughts on [season 4 episode] *Arkangel*, so we went back and re-drafted it. *Crocodile*, also from this season, was originally written with a male lead, but we sent the script to Andrea Riseborough for one of the other roles and she came back wanted to play that part. We thought about it, thought it was interesting, and went with it.

As more and more people get involved with it, you get more flesh on the bones. My job at the start when I'm writing the script is to describe what I think the finished programme will be and then it transforms throughout the process. Luckily, I've found that often can't remember what it originally looked like in my head, because the finished product has so many things I wouldn't have thought of added to that skeleton.

You can't be that topical – you don't know how the world is going to be in a year and a half's time. You don't want to be talking about 18 months



ago when you premiere. We don't shy away from it, but that's not where the ideas tend to come from anyway – we don't look at Brexit and react.

It's really hard to say which is the flagship episode of a *Black Mirror* season – everyone has different favourites. Of those that saw the two preview episodes of season four (*Arkangel* and *USS Callister*) there was about a 50-50 split. They're all very strong flavours this time around.

*San Junipero*, the first episode written for Netflix, was a conscious decision to try to experiment, expand and up-end what the show is. That's why *USS Callister* is very dark in places, but has moments of comedy that you might not have expected from *Black Mirror* a few years ago.

Because we were pleased with how *San Junipero* came out, we gained the confidence to play with the tone more than we have before. We were also looking at what we hadn't done before – we didn't think we could do the eighties, but we've now done the eighties. With *USS Callister* it was, ‘Can we do space?’.

More often than not, I find myself surprised when we get it right about technology – we don't tend to research much. It's a little bit chilling if someone who works in certain field says I'm right about something. There's an episode in this season called *Metalhead* starring Maxine Peake that is a sort of technological nightmare playing out very quickly and primal. That's not the sort of story we normally tell – it tends to be about human dilemma. **S**

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